

The Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian

Introduction and Commentary: Revelation Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Brothers and Sisters, we live in a sinful and adulterous generation, where the love of many has grown cold, where love has been redefined as tolerance of sin in every form--and hatred or intolerance, as upholding Biblical morality. It is a generation that seeks instant gratification; one in which good is called evil, and evil good; where light is called darkness and darkness light; wherein truth is thrown to the ground and trampled upon, but falsehoods and utopian delusions are preached and paraded in the public square. This is a generation where godly wisdom has been abandoned for utilitarian materialism; where heresies abound, where entitlement trumps hard work and sacrifice, where the worship of idols and demons, even Satan himself, is ascending, while the worship of the Lord God in spirit and in truth is diminishing. It is a generation where murderers and anarchists are called freedom fighters and civil rights activists; where governments and the press collude to suppress the truth; where the armies of Islam are on the march--its Trojan cavalries (not just a single horse as in ancient times) have already been invited inside the city/national gates terrorizing local populations; where Islamic deception and manipulation are slowly enticing naïve politically correct peoples all across the globe into self-imposed dhimmitude, i.e., their voluntary bowing down to Sharia Law, reinforcing Islam's self-perception of its superiority over them. It is a generation that projects its own shortcomings on its enemies, dehumanizing them through repeated lies and innuendoes to such an extent that it either believes its own lies and/or is unaware or numb to its own internal darkness. Meanwhile cutting edge science is further dehumanizing them through the promise of designer genetic engineering (the eugenics of the 21st century), animal-human chimerism, and transhumanism (the merging of implanted technology and humanity) which looks to alter the physical nature of man himself. Then there are those who look at mankind as a scourge on the earth which needs to be aborted, culled, or eliminated -- a suicidal/genocidal generation, yet full of "elites" energized by their own narcissism and a desire for longevity, hedonism, and immortality. Then there are those on the sidelines who are often lulled to spiritual sleep by the constant barrage of secularism, political correctness, and self-indulgences, or worse, dreamy escapism, drug and video game addiction, and suicide.

Consequently, if our eyes are on this world alone, we might lose all hope and fall into despondency. However, as Orthodox Christians, we always have hope -- we may be in the world, but are not to be of this world. Rather, we are to be crucified/dead to the world and to live in Christ--our lives being hidden in Christ, seated with Him in the Heavens. We are told by our Lord Jesus Christ to seek first the Kingdom of God and to do the work of God, that is to believe in God and He Whom He has sent, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and to fulfill His commandments.

It is with this in mind that I would like to begin this series of Lessons on the last Book of the Bible, the *Revelation* (or, the *Apocalypse*) of St. John the Theologian, the only prophetic book of the *New Testament*. Within its pages, the believing heart and mind of the Orthodox Christian finds the future fate of the world and the victory of the Church described. Although filled with mystical visions it is also a great book of hope, a trustworthy navigational guide for

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the faithful who find themselves in the midst of great difficulties, of tribulation, such as the times we live in. Indeed, St. John the Theologian has written in the 3rd verse of the *Apocalypse*, *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.* It is a blessing to read, to be a reader, to hear the Apocalypse read aloud, and to follow the teachings of this much neglected book.

Unfortunately, because of its prophetic nature and mystical visions, the book of *Revelation*, from the beginning, has attracted the attention of heretics, secularists, “scholars”, and heterodox Christians among many others who often drown in the depths of its mysteries. Not guided by the Holy Spirit in the Church, they misinterpret what they read and propagate their errors to others. As Orthodox Christians we are continually reminded to read the commentaries and writings of the Saints, i.e., the Fathers of the Church, when we read the Scriptures, because they serve as guides and correctors of our own fallible interpretations.

When we come to the Book of *Revelation*, as Orthodox, we are somewhat at a disadvantage. However, there are a few ancient and modern Orthodox commentaries in English (see below) which will be used in these lessons/classes.

Ancient Orthodox Commentaries on the *Apocalypse* in English:

1. **Victorinus** (Bishop of Pettau, died c. AD 304), *Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, pp. 344-360. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07.vi.ii.html>. This commentary of Victorinus was revised by St. Jerome in AD 398 to replace the former’s chiliastic interpretation. The original form of Gaius Marius Victorinus’ *Commentary on the Apocalypse* can be found at https://www.preteristarchive.com/0260_victorinus_apocalypse/
2. **Oecumenius** (layman, c. 6th century AD), *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, in *Ancient Christian Texts: Greek Commentaries on Revelation, Oecumenius and Andrew of Caesarea*, IVP Academic Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2011, pp.107.
3. **St. Andrew of Caesarea** (AD 563-637), *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, in *Ancient Christian Texts: Greek Commentaries on Revelation, Oecumenius and Andrew of Caesarea*, IVP Academic Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2011, pp. 208.
4. **Venerable Bede** (AD 672-735), *Explanation of the Apocalypse*, Translated By The Rev. Edw. Marshall, M.A., F.S.A. Formerly Fellow Of Corpus Christi Coll., Oxford. Oxford and London: James Parker And Co. 1878. Available online at <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bede/untitled-31.shtml>.
5. William C. Weinrich (editor), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XII, Revelation*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2005, pp.454.
6. NOTE: Sts. Irenaeus and Hippolytus both have extensive commentary on the Antichrist in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1 and Volume 5 available online at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html>

Modern Orthodox Commentaries on the *Apocalypse* in English:

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1. **Archbishop Averky** (Taushev) (translated from the Russian by Fr. Seraphim Rose), *The Apocalypse in the Teaching of Ancient Christianity*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1995, pp. 306.
2. **Archbishop Averky** (Taushev), *The Book of Revelation of St John the Theologian Translated by Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose)*, in Archbishop Averky (Taushev) *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, Volume III: The Epistles and the Apocalypse*, Holy Trinity Seminary Press, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY, 2018, pp.227-326, 343.
3. **Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios** (an extremely popular conservative New Calendar Greek Archimandrite homilist who reposed in 2006) who gave a series of 100 detailed recorded homilies on the book of Revelation which were transcribed for this series of 5 books. These homilies are extremely well researched and written, contain much valuable Biblical and historical information (both ancient and modern), and are very useful from a homiletical perspective. Because he also makes use of the writings of Greek Saints and ecclesiastical writers whose writings are little known and not found in English translations, these books are quite valuable for tracing the Greek Orthodox Tradition on the *Apocalypse* from the 1st to the 21st centuries.
 - a. Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios, *Homilies on the Book of the Revelation, Volume I*, St. Nikodemos Publications, Bethlehem, PA, 2009, pp, 318.
 - b. Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios, *Revelation, The Seven Seals, Volume II*, St. Nikodemos Publications, Bethlehem, PA, 2014, pp, 243.
 - c. Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios, *Revelation, The Seven Trumpets & the Antichrist, Volume III*, St. Nikodemos Publications, Bethlehem, PA, 2015, pp, 345.
 - d. Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios, *Revelation, The Seven Angels, Volume IV*, St. Nikodemos Publications, Bethlehem, PA, 2017, pp, 305.
 - e. Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios, *Revelation, The Triumph of the Lamb, Volume V*, St. Nikodemos Publications, Bethlehem, PA, 2020, pp, 287.
4. **Vladimir Moss**, *Apocalypse, Book of the End.*, 2011, pp. 380, online only, <http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/books/> He often draws upon prophecies in recent centuries including 20th century "catacomb" prophecies in support of his interpretations. He also has his own personal innovative ideas on chilianism.
5. *Revelation, The Orthodox New Testament, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation, Volume 2, PRAXAPOSTOLOS*, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 1999, 510-600. The translation in this volume is based on the Constantinople 1904 Greek text. There are 50 pages of notes that assist with textual differences, translation, as well as interpretation and Patristic commentary.

Because the current Lectionary of the Greek Orthodox Church, which dates from the 6th century AD or earlier, does not indicate any passages from the *Apocalypse* to be read during the

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Divine Liturgy,¹ we are not used to hearing it, nor having our priests and bishops discuss and explain it. It was considered too hard to understand, too easy to misinterpret, so it has been much ignored since the early centuries.

However, the *Mozarabic Rite*, officially called the **Hispano-Mozarabic Rite**, and in the past also called the **Visigothic Rite** or the **Hispanic Rite**, is a Western Orthodox Christian Rite used on the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) from at least as early as the 6th century AD, a time when Byzantine influences were still strong in the south of Spain. The Visigoths, who were Arians, arrived in Spain in 507 setting up their kingdom around Toledo. But there was already a distinct liturgical tradition in Hispania prior to their arrival as evidenced by the fact that the Hispanic liturgy lacks any Arian influence. The Visigoths were also reasonably tolerant. King Liuvigild's son Hermenegild became the first Visigoth king to convert to Nicene Christianity in the 580s. His brother Recared, who ruled from 586-601, converted to Chalcedonian Christianity, declared his faith in the Nicene creed, denounced Arianism, and convened the 3rd Council of Toledo in 589.

Liturgical practices were standardized under the Visigoth King Sisenand who convened the 4th Council of Toledo in 633. The liturgical rite is thought to have been highly influenced by St. Isidore of Seville (560-636) who participated in the 4th council. One of the earliest extant manuscripts of the Mozarabic Rite includes many readings from the book of the *Apocalypse* in its lectionary. One very old manuscript dating from AD 1067, the *Mozarabic Missale*, preserves a 2-year lectionary cycle containing 15 readings for the the *Apocalypse* in the Divine Liturgy in addition to the Apostolos and the Gospel readings.

The readings §65-§87, in order, from *Revelation* are as follows: 1:9-10, 17-18; 1: 1-18; 2:1-7; 2:8-11; 3:7-13; 2:12-17; 2:18-29 ; 3:1-16; 7:2-17; 21:9-23; 4:1-10; 14:1-5; 19:5-18; 7:7-10; 4:2-4; 10:8-10. So, even though the Mozarabic Lectionary used readings from Revelation during the Liturgy, its compilers carefully selected passages excluding those sections which were most most likely to be misinterpreted.²

Following the Reconquista of Spain and Portugal (which lasted from 722–1492), the Roman Catholic Church tried to suppress and replace this Rite with the Latin Mass, but it survived in several regions and continued to be used especially in Toledo, where today, it still remains the primary liturgical rite. A few Western Rite Orthodox Churches also use this Rite.

According to Archbishop Averky (Taushev) the Typikon does appoint the *New Testament Epistles* and the *Apocalypse* to be read in order between Vespers and Matins at the Saturday Night Vigil beginning with the Sunday of All Saints. But this is seldom if ever performed in our days, and is not listed in the Russian Typikon published by Metropolitan Agafangel that our parish uses. Nevertheless, this shows that there is some precedent, albeit very minimal in recent centuries, for reading the *Apocalypse* in the Orthodox Church Services.

1. <http://www.bombaxo.com/greek.html> (website not currently active, but promises to return)

2. Mozarabic (Spain) Lectionary AD 1067, contains readings from the *Apocalypse*

Source: <http://www.bombaxo.com/comicus.html>, (website not currently active, but promises to return).

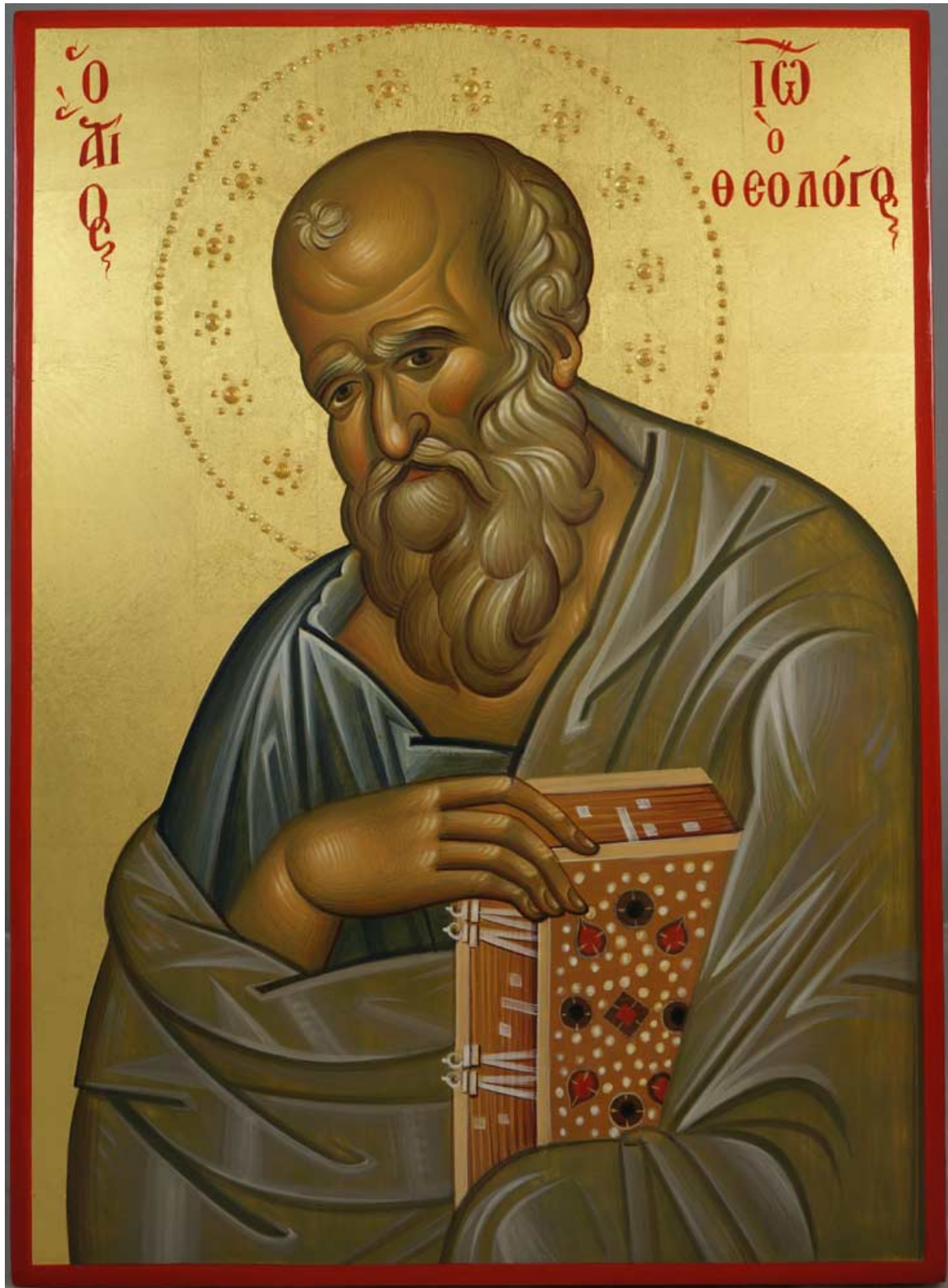
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The current Greek text of the *Apocalypse*, reprinted today by the Church of Greece was that published in 1904 by B. Antoniadis for the Holy Synod at Constantinople. That “official” text is available online at http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/bible/bible.asp?contents=new_testament/contents.asp.

The main text I will be using in these classes for the English translation will be the King James Version (KJV) -- being a very standard and fairly accurate text compared to most modern translations. The text will be corrected when the 1904 Constantinople text and the KJV differ significantly.

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Revelation Chapter 1

Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John: 2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him Which Is, and Which Was, and Which Is To Come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; 5 And from Jesus Christ, Who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

7 Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen. 8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

9 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, 11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; 13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. 14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; 15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. 16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: 18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. 19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; 20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

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Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

A revelation is an unveiling of a mystery. Or as St. Andrew of Caesarea states: “Revelation is the declaration of hidden mysteries which take place by the illumination of the nous, whether by divine dreams or visions, or in a state of wakefulness like St. John”.

In answer to the question as to why the Revelation was given to the Holy Apostle John the Theologian by an Angel and not by the Lord Himself, none of the Patristic commentaries on Revelation (Oecumenius, Victorinus, St. Andrew of Caesarea, or Bede) discuss this.

Among the modern commentators Vladimir Moss and Archimandrite Athanasios Miltinaios, Vladimir Moss gives quick reference to it in his *Apocalypse, Book of the End*, 2011, p. 23, online only at <http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/books/>:

“The Revelation was transmitted through an angel to God's servant John the Apostle and Evangelist, who then recorded it for posterity. Such is the mark of all true knowledge. It comes to us from God, through the mediation of His holy servants - angels, apostles and prophets.”

“But it is the conservative New Calendarist Archimandrite Athanasios Miltinaios that best responds to that question in his *Homilies on the Book of the Revelation, Volume I*, St. Nikodemos Publications, Bethlehem, PA, 2009, pp, 43-44:

“The Apostles commonly use the word servant as they write their epistles. However, here we have the simple recording of the name of John, simply John, without a title such as the disciple of Christ or the Apostle of Christ. The absence of these titles shows that John very likely knew the receivers and the readers of his book. They were very close to him. It is also obvious that the book of the Revelation is given to the Church from God the Father, through Jesus Christ, through the angel, through John to the Church.

“So what we have here is a living chain of *paradosis*, or teaching tradition. [*Paradosis* means tradition in Greek.]. It literally means to pass down, to have one person deliver and another person receive. So, God the Father gives to the Son incarnate, not God the Word, but to Jesus Christ, to God incarnate. Jesus Christ gives to the angel; the angel gives to John, and John passes it to the Church. So, here we have the wonder of the living Tradition, or *paradosis*. This is precisely why the living Tradition, along with Holy Scripture makes up the basis or foundation of the Church.

“As we know, it is holy Tradition that preserved the authenticity and validity of the Holy Scriptures. Holy Tradition told us which book is genuine and which is fraudulent. Those who discard and disregard the Tradition of the Church, whether Protestant, or Orthodox who have been heavily influenced by the non-Orthodox must understand this; they disregard the Tradition of the Church. The key, and we will mention this repeatedly; the key to the Orthodox

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interpretation of the book of the Revelation is to be found in the treasure chest of holy Tradition. If you do not take advantage of this key that holy Tradition has given you, then you will never interpret and see the true meaning of Scripture. This is why the Protestants interpret Scripture every which way, with the result being the deterioration of their faith into thousands of pieces. They have no idea what they believe today, what they believed yesterday, and what they will believe tomorrow.

“... *And he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw (1:1-2).* So, John saw visions; he saw images and symbols; he saw these things. He did not *imagine* them; nor did he produce them, or fantasize them. He actually saw them. These are literal accounts of what he actually saw.”

Revelation 1:2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

St. John bares witness that what he wrote down as the book of the Revelation is the word God, the testimony of Jesus Christ, and everything that was revealed to him. St. John neither adds to the revelation, nor subtracts from it. How do we know this? Because of the warning he gives us at the end of the book:

Rev. 22:18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: 19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. 20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Revelation 1:3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

He that reads is singular. They that hear is in the pleural. One reads and many hear, for the Scriptures were read in the Church and the blessing comes from within the liturgical environment of the Church, where Christ, the Theotokos, the Angels, and the Saints are present with us. We then take those words and thoughts and meditate upon them, reflect upon their meaning, and their meaning for us as Orthodox Christians both collectively and personally.

St. Dionysius the Great, Patriarch of Alexandria (AD 190-265) notes: “The darkness (hiddenness) of this book does not prevent one from being astonished at it. And even if I do not understand everything in it, it is only because of my incapability. I cannot be a judge of the truths which are contained in it or measure them with the poverty of my mind; being guided more by faith than by understanding, I find them only surpassing my understanding.”

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Revelation 1:1 *John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from “God” [Constantinople 1904 text, not “him”] which is, and which was, and “the (one who is) coming” [Constantinople 1904 text]; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;*

St John addresses the 7 churches he was especially close to, living in Ephesus himself, but at the same time in these 7 (“7” being an expression of completeness) he addresses the Christian Church as a whole. **from him which is** signifies the Father (***I Am that I Am***. Exodus 3:14), **which was** signifies the Word (Who ***was in the beginning with God***, John 1:2), and **which is to come** signifies the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (Who always descends upon the Church’s children in holy baptism and in all fullness is to descend in the future age.).

Archbishop Averky considers it most natural to understand *the seven Spirits which before his throne* to be the 7 chief angels spoken of in **Tobit 12:15**: *I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One.* Those others would include Gabriel, Michael, and 4 others unnamed in Scripture.

St. Andrew of Caesarea understands the 7 spirits to be the angels who govern the seven churches. Others understand this to mean the 7-fold Holy Spirit Himself (Isaiah 11:2: *And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;*).

Revelation 1:5 *And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,*

Christ is always faithful, being the Truth, He witnesses to the truth, raised from the dead on the Appointed Festival of FirstFruits, He is the FirstFruits of those raised from the dead.

Revelation 1:6 *And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

Kings and priests here is in the sense in which God has promised this to His chosen people, through the prophets

To Israel: (Exodus 19:6. *And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.*).

To the Church: (1 Peter 2:9 *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:*

St. Andrew of Caesarea writes: “It is fitting to give glory to Him Who through His love has freed us from the chains of death and has washed us from the filth of sin by the outpouring of

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his-life giving blood bringing to the Father the living sacrifice of a reasonable service, rather than the sacrifice of irrational beasts.”

***Revelation 1:7** Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.*

Here is depicted the 2nd glorious coming of Christ in complete agreement with the Gospels (Matt 24:30, 25:31; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27, John 19:37.), and the chief theme of **Revelation**, the Second Coming and the Great Judgment.

Acts of Apostles: 1:9 *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

Zechariah 12:10: *And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. [Concerning the end times when all the nations come together against Jerusalem--the battle of Armageddon, where Israel is victorious.]*

St. Andrew writes: “Although every eye will see him coming with glory, those who pierced Him and all the tribes of the earth that have remained in unbelief will grieve.”

Revelation 1:8 *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*

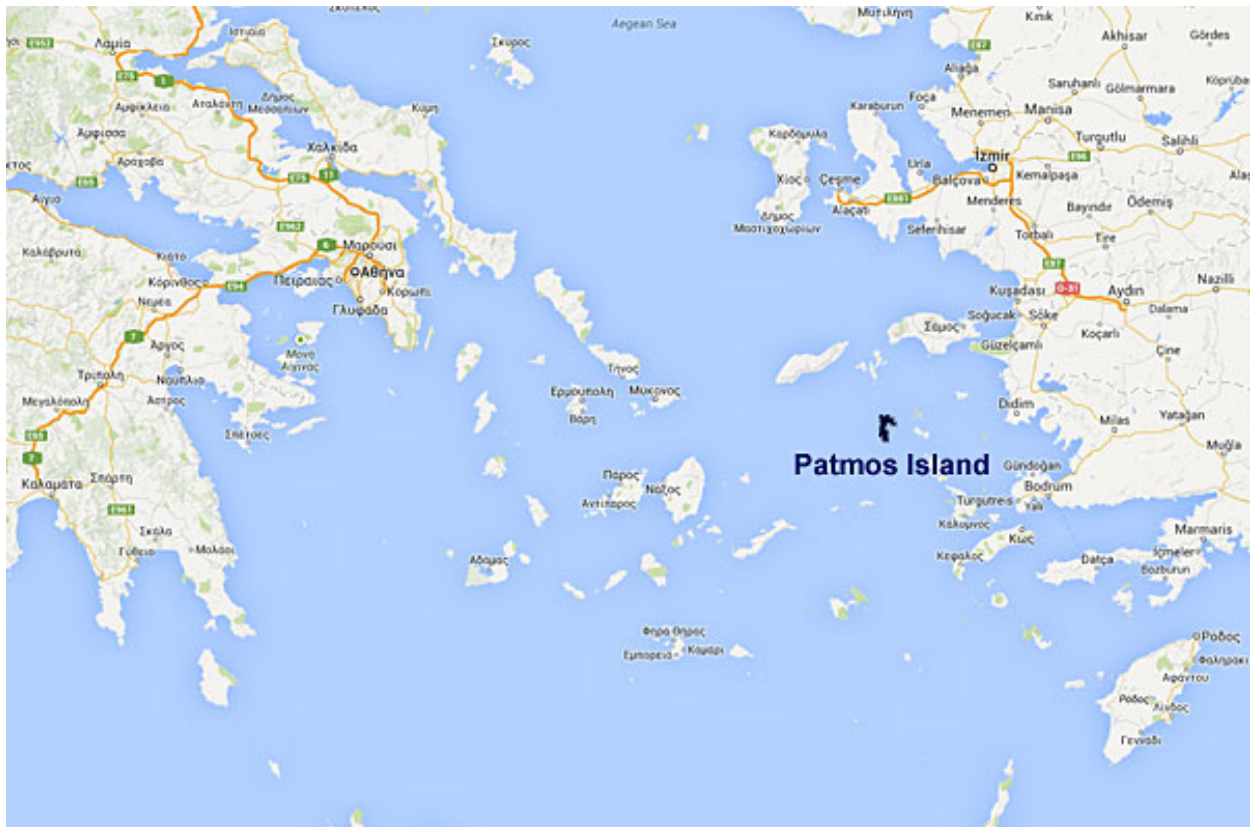
St. Andrew writes: “Here Christ is shown to be God who rules all things, who is without beginning and similarly without end, who is and who was before and who is without limit, since He is eternal with the Father. For this reason He gives to each the wages of their deeds.

The seal of the truth to all that is witnessed and recorded by St. John, is the testimony of Jesus Christ Himself, the Almighty, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

Revelation 1:9 *I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

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When and where was the Revelation given to St. John? He tells us the place where he received them: the island Patmos, one of the Sporades islands in the Aegean Sea, near the islands of Icaria and Samos. Patmos is rather barren and poorly inhabited because of the lack of water and an unhealthy climate. It was in a cave in a certain mountain where St. John received the revelations. Even to this day there is a small “Monastery of the Apocalypse” there which you can visit.

In the same verse he also tells us when he received the Apocalypse. This was at the time when St. John was in exile on the island of Patmos. Why? In his own words, *for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ*, that is for his fervent apostolic preaching of Jesus Christ. Because of this the Emperor Domitian had him arrested in Ephesus and brought to Rome and thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, out of which he came unharmed and with renewed strength. Domitian then banished him to Patmos in AD 96.

Revelation 1:10 *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.*

In this verse St. John gives us even the day of the week on which he was given the revelations. This was *the Lord's day* (in Greek, *Kyriaki imera*), Sunday. This was the first day of

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the week, which the Jews called *mia savvaton*, that is, “the first day after Saturday”; but which the Christians called “the Lord’s day” in honor of the Resurrection. The very existence of such a name already indicates that the Christians celebrated this day in place of the Old Testament Sabbath, and is a rebuke to the 7th-day Adventist heresy, who continue to worship on the Jewish Sabbath.

Having mentioned the place and time, St. John indicates likewise his own condition, in which he was given the visions. *I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day*, he says. In the language of prophets, *to be in the Spirit* is to be in the spiritual condition when a man sees, hears and feels not with his bodily organs, but with all his inward being.

In such an extraordinary condition of his spirit, St. John heard a loud voice as of a trumpet--remember trumpets, shofars announced the coming of the Lord on Mt. Sinai to give Moses the revelation of the Jewish Law, the Creation, and earliest history of man:

Revelation 1:11 *Saying, [I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; (added in the KJV)] and, what thou seest write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches [which are in Asia (added in the KJV)]; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.*



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There follows a series of four visions in the rest of the book. These revelations are given initially to the seven churches comprising the metropolis of Ephesus where St. John the Theologian spent many years as an Apostle and had his earthly dwelling. These seven churches are also representative of the Church as a whole both in space and in time. Thus, these revelations were not meant for them alone, but for the whole Body of Christ, the Church, for all times.



Revelation 1:12-13 *And I turned [Constantinople text adds in that place] to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks; 13 and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*

Here is St. John's description of the outward appearance of the One Who appeared to John *like unto the Son of Man*. He stood in the midst of seven candlesticks, [like our 7-branched Menorah on our Altar tables] symbolizing the seven churches (as explained below, verse 20) and was clothed in a *garment down to the foot*, the *ephod*, the long garment of the Jewish high priests (Exodus 28:31). But here these are not the normal clothes of the Jewish High Priests, nor of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest is dressed in four simple linen

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garments and linen miter. He was, like a king, girded about the breast with a golden belt. These features indicate both his high-priesthood after the order of Melchizadek, and His royal dignity of the being the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the One Who appeared.

***Revelation 1:14** His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire.*

Whiteness of the hair serves usually as a sign of old age. This sign testifies that the Son of Man Who appeared is one with the Father, that He is the same as the “Ancient of Days” Whom the holy prophet Daniel also saw in a mystical vision (Dan 7:9-10, 13-14), that He is the same eternal God as is God the Father. [Note: The Orthodox Church Service for the Meeting of the Lord on Feb 2 identifies the “Ancient of Days” with God the Son: *The Ancient of Days appears this day as a babe*--thus His Divine and human natures. St. John Chrysostom, in his commentary on Daniel, states that Daniel “was the first and only one (in the Old Testament) to see the Father and the Son, as if in a vision.”]

His eyes were like a fiery flame, which signifies His Divine zeal for the salvation of the human race, that before His glance there is nothing hidden or dark, and that He is flaming with anger against every iniquity. [Even our patron Saint Seraphim of Sarov’s face in his conversation with Moltovilov, when full of the Holy Spirit, was so bright with the uncreated light, Moltovilov couldn’t bear to look at him, at first.]

***Revelation 1:15a.** And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.*

Brass is a precious metallic mixture with a fiery red or golden yellow sheen (compare Daniel 10:5-6).

St. Andrew of Caesarea: “The feet are the Apostles, as the support of the church...The feet of Christ are the Apostles who have been heated, in emulation of Christ, in the furnace of temptations.”

***Revelation 1:15b** And His voice as the sound of many waters.*

That is, His voice was loud and powerful like the voice of a threatening judge who strikes with trembling the disturbed souls of condemned men.

***Revelation 1:16.a** And He had in his right hand seven stars.*

According to the explanation given to St. John a bit later, these seven stars signify the seven representatives of the churches, or bishops, called here the *angels* [messengers] *of the churches*. By this we are told that the Lord Jesus holds in his right hand the shepherds of the Church.

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Revelation 1:16b And out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword

This symbolizes the all-penetrating power of the word which comes from the mouth of God (compare Hebrews 4:12, *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*)



Revelation 1:16c And His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

This is an image of that unutterable glory of God by which the Lord shone on Mount Tabor (Matt. 17:2). All these characteristics present to us the whole image of the fearful Judge, Chief Priest and King as the Lord Jesus Christ will one day appear on earth in His Second Coming to judge the living and the dead.

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Revelation 1:17a And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.

From this one may conclude that the beloved disciple, who had once lain on the breast of Jesus, did not recognize in the One Who had appeared a single familiar feature. and this is not surprising, for if the disciples did not easily recognize their Lord after His Resurrection in His glorified body on earth, all the more difficult would it be to recognize Him in this resplendent heavenly glory.

Revelation 1:17b-18 And He laid His right hand upon me, [saying unto me (added in KJV)], Fear not; I am the First and the Last, I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore. [Amen (added in KJV)]; and have the keys of hell and death [Constantinople text reads of Death and of Hades].

From these words St. John had to understand that the One Who appeared was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and that his appearance could not be fatal for the Apostle, but on the contrary would be life-giving. To have the keys to something signified among the Jews to receive authority over something. Thus, *the keys of hell and of death* signify authority over the death of the body and the soul [physical and spiritual death]. Our Lord Jesus Christ can lock or unlock those doors for each of us. [Note: our Divine Services of the Orthodox Church are full of the teaching that Christ has authority over hell and death.]

Revelation 1:19-20 Write the things [which thou hast seen (added in KJV)], and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand [lit. on my right], and the seven golden candlesticks. 20 The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

In conclusion, the One Who had appeared commands John to write down that which he has seen and what is to be, explaining that the seven stars are the angels or the representatives of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks signify these churches themselves.

“Since Christ is *the true Light* (John 1:9), those who have become enriched by His illumination are like candlesticks which illuminate the darkness of the present life. (St. Andrew, ch. 2).

St. Andrew of Caesarea: Since Christ is the true light, those who are made rich in His brightness are because of Him [become] lamps, and they make bright the nighttime of the present life. Rightly too are the churches called *lampstands*, for they have lights who *hold fast the word of life*, as the apostle says (St. Paul, *Phil 2:16*). And these lamps and lampstands are golden because of the precious and pure character of the faith that is in them. Over each of these an angel is established as protector, as the Lord says. Indeed, Gregory the Theologian understands

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the present passage as follows: Those whom he has figuratively named *stars* are so named because of the brightness and purity of their nature.